REVIEWS OF NEW FICTION

CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIFE CONTINUES HER NARRATIVE

MY SON. By Corra Harris. George H. Doran Company.

Reviewed by GEORGE KENT.

SEVERAL years ago Corra Harris wrote a book entitled "A Circuit Rider's Wife," the story of the struggles of an austere Methodist preacher and his wife. The preacher, William by name, was the fourth minister of his line. "He was born with a prayer on his lips." He believed with a fiery zeal and he brooked no compromise with his convictions. He remained until his death an obscure circuit rider because he would not pander to the prejudices of his congregation nor stoop to stroke its influential members with a soft hand.

In the present volume the story of the circuit rider's son is told. Here the mother confesses that throughout her years of struggle by the side of her husband she has longed for freedom, for escape from the church's confining influence.

"When you have lived for so many years in parsonages furnished by committees you do crave the privilege of having your own things and rubbing them and looking at them and possessing them. The hard, wooden bottomed chairs that prevail in parsonages are durable, but they get to be hard on the very soul of you from having to sit on them so much.

"How many times had I been tempted to speak the truth to stewards in our church or at the women's missionary meeting that would have skinned somebody alive for meanness when I had to say something meek and forbearing for William's sake! What a relief it would have been to tear around sometimes regardless of my soul's salvation. But I never did. I was waiting for Peter to grow up, win a place in the world and open the door of this prison for me."

It is irony that Peter should choose also to enter the ministry, the fifth of his line in direct succession—Peter who was a cheerful, practical, modern young man, who made his decision without trepidation and with an eye already fixed on the "best appointments."

"Now, here he was about to close the door in my face forever. You do not know how much you desire something until you are about to lose it. I suffered."

She did indeed. She reflects bitterly that for woman there is no independence. "You may be a home body, but you must travel. You may want to see the world, but you must remain at home and let him be your world. I do not seem to make it clear; but if you have streaked it this way and that after one man half a lifetime and then suddenly, when you were settling down in your own mind and spirit, if you are obliged to get up, turn around and follow another one up and down you know what I mean."

Peter enters the ministry, and, although an honest and straightforward gentleman, he contrives to make himself agreeable to his congregation and preaches only such things as will please them. The result is tremendous popularity and none of the jarring discords that William's inexorable pursuit and attack of the wicked brought down upon them. "I should have been proud of him and satisfied," she writes, "since for so many years I had craved easement from the sterner doctrines of salvation. But I was not proud of him. I was terribly uneasy about him and his water and sand gospel."

Her son mounts upward, despite her concern, and goes each year to a better church and is finally made preacher in the most important church in the jurisdiction of the Conference. The old woman clings to the church's past glory and sees in Peter's philosophical sermons a retrogression. She confesses that she is old fashioned and talkative, and we who read are inclined to nod and agree. Nevertheless, she gives utterance to many just criticisms of the modern church, and some splendid interpretations and characterizations of the people in the pews. She stands where the church to-day stands and her quandary is the church's quandary. She stands between her husband, the ascetic, forever wrestling with his soul, and her son, the glib pulpit entertainer. Of the latter type she says: "Their hearts do not burn, their lips have not been touched with holy fire. They lack some awful quality of spirit which the old preachers had and which they have not." Her loyalty is with the old, and with her aid the son returns to the way of his father.

She has many opinions and she expresses them. They range over the field of politics, the press, the war, opinions strained through the cloth of goodness, which, despite the fact that she is a sweet old woman with the courage to sit beside the bed of a dying harlot, is a severe blue law type of goodness. The expression of these opinions, together with her broodings over her son, sands the tracks of the narrative and for a time it drags. In the end Peter finds his soul, wrestles with it, emerges victor and almost immediately afterward falls in love with a girl with a "verse of goodness" face.

The beginning of the story promises beautifully, but, like many precocious things, it disappoints. The middle sags and the ending is forced. It is to be regretted that Mrs. Harris abandoned the personal element as set forth in the early portion of the book for the business of propaganda. There she deals sympathetically and simply with the situation in which the old mother, tired of the rigors of a circuit rider's life, longs to escape. Her acceptance of her fate and her solicitude for her son, who is more wrapped up in pleasing than in saving his congregation, is also well wrought. We are, however, inclined to doubt that the old woman would have accepted her son's choice of the ministry without a peep of protest, or at least an attempt at dissuasion or discussion. The explanation is sufficiently convincing for the purposes of the story. Once Peter is under way in the ministry the propaganda commences and the remainder of the book might have been written by an interested religious publicity department.

Corra Harris.

But he cannot escape himself

THE JOURNAL OF HENRY BULVER. By C. Veheyne. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Reviewed by H. L. PANGBORN.

THIS story won the £500 prize in the British "Collins novel contest" of last year, wherein the judges were Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes and J. D. Beresford. And in this case one has no quarrel with the judgment. The book is extraordinary both in conception and in execution. It is thoroughly alive, not at all built to any conventional pattern, and is artistic throughout, though it is something of a *tour de force* and occasionally rather high in key. But its intensity is real; it is genuine emotion even if the personality of the hero is somewhat askew. As to that, he ends by killing himself in fear of approaching insanity, and much of his action is scarcely to be classed as sane. Yet there is nothing that is not plausible in him, nor is he too much of a pathological specimen to be interestingly human.

In form it is the autobiography of a genius—actor, playright, journalist, essayist and theatrical manager. He begins his career by running away from his father's drapery shop to a vagrant year as a travelling actor; returns to the shop for some time and is about to marry in order to secure independence, but shies off and runs away on his wedding day. He becomes private secretary to an elderly peer and then elopes with his employer's wife, not because he wants to but because she has fallen in love with him and he can't bear to refuse her. Naturally they do not get on well. But his first play is a great success, the burdensome lady leaves him, and he is fairly launched. After sundry minor adventures he falls violently in love with a girl who is engaged to another man, whom he successfully "cuts out" in spite of the girl's fear of him and her feeling that it is dangerous to love him too much. Her fears are justified, as he goes gallivanting after a showy actress, but he is forgiven and taken back, though he remains dubiously faithful. His wife is drowned, with a suspicion of suicide; his young daughter dies because of his failure to take intelligent care of her, despite his absorbing love for her, and he goes off again with the actress.

Their ship is wrecked in midocean (like the Titanic) and he is supposed to be drowned, but is actually saved. He conceals his identity long enough—long enough for a flamboyant biography of him to appear—and then reappears in London, for a meteoric finish, ending in his suicide at the apex of his spectacular success as a dramatist. Such an outline sounds melodramatic, but the reality of the book is not so. To handle such material without extravagance requires fine artistic ability.

One trouble with any such presentation of the abnormal genius is that the reader must accept the superlative quality of his work as a primary postulate and an offset to his eccentricity. But Miss Veheyne succeeds very well in creating that impression; one accepts Bulver as all she claims. Sometimes one believes in him just because he is incredible—but one does believe.

Among the minor characters are some bitingly realistic portraits, drawn, one feels sure, from the living model—for instance, the vicious critic, showily whiskered and malicious, a vegetarian and mountebank, whose first name remains Bernard. The women of the book are exceedingly well done—vivid types. And whatever one may think of the hero he is unquestionably very much alive in Miss Veheyne's portrayal.

Her mother was too good looking

BLIND MICE. By C. Kay Scott. George H. Doran Company.

THE mother-in-law joke usually assumes maternal interference in a family through affection for the married son or daughter and criticism of the other's spouse. Mr. Scott has reversed this formula and shown a woman so vain and pretty that she breaks up a happy home by turning her sin-in-law against the daughter. Mrs. Merwent was the spoiled child of a Southern family. Her irritability and peevishness caused her husband to leave her, and when her daughter married John Winter her criticism was very bitter. Therefore her announced visit was dreaded by both. When she entered the household she at once began to flatter and pet John until he felt that his wife had been unjust to her own mother. She broke up the friendship John had for Jim Sprague and caused the family to indulge in needless extravagance. Worry made the daughter ill. A conspiracy of friends caused the mother to return to the Sunny South, but the damage that her visit had caused was irreparable.

The author realizes that *Puck* was right in saying "What fools these mortals be," and he has shown the tragic side of human folly. Mrs. Merwent is a character so well portrayed in her semi-unconscious malignity that she seems to step out of Balzac.

The old tragedy of the square peg

THE TRAGIC BRIDE. By Francis Brett Young. E. P. Dutton & Co.

ALTHOUGH a vein of tragedy runs through this novel the title is a trifle misleading. For the story does not deal primarily with the tragedy of great emotions leading to an overwhelming catastrophe; rather it is the tragedy of slow decay, the tragedy of maladaptation, of want of a square peg in a round hole and of the resulting friction. In the beginning we have an atmosphere of rustic beauty and simplicity as the scene of a glamorous love affair; then with jolting suddenness occurs the one unquestionable tragedy of the book—a tragedy of accident rather than the more dramatic tragedy of character—the lovers are strolling through the hills; the man stumbles and the gun he is carrying is discharged and blows out his brains.

This hideous conclusion to a picturesque romance constitutes the beginning rather than the end of the story. The girl, Gabrielle Hewish, is stunned by the blow; she is forced, under circumstances which are not entirely convincing, to marry a man many years her senior; and the rest of the book is devoted to the difficulties arising from the incompatibility of temperaments. In most respects these difficulties are rather shadowy, indicated rather than described; in only one regard does the author dwell on them in detail. That is in relation to Arthur Payne, a boy who comes to Gabrielle's husband as a student and who ultimately falls in love with the wife. The love is returned, although the husband does not seem even to suspect it, but it is discovered by the boy's mother, who sets a trap for the pair and definitely succeeds in parting them. The last we hear of Gabrielle is that she has been exonerated by a jury for the death of her husband, who was killed by a mysterious but presumably accidental shot when out hunting.

The ending of the book is rather disappointing. It is too indefinite, too noncommittal; it is as if the author was content merely to outline what it was his duty to portray in detail. He concludes the book with the abruptness with which one might end a play; but while, with a drama the method might be effective it is disappointingly sudden in the case of a novel which aims to trace the entire career of the characters instead of merely to afford us flashes of the most intense scenes.

But the book on the whole is well done, the characters are clearly drawn, the situations are interesting and vital. In spite of its pathos the story is interfused with beauty; in spite of the sense it gives us of a disappointment and futility in life there is much in it that tells of youthful enthusiasm and happiness and hope. And, more important, it leaves one with the sense that what it has depicted are real human experiences.

History of four generations

THE DIXONS. By Florence Finch Kelly. E. P. Dutton & Co.

RECENTLY THE HERALD endeavored to find out why novels written by Englishmen had a wider appeal in the United States than the home product. Answers to the question by publishers, critics of literature and purchasers of works of fiction seemed to resolve into one, that in the main the British authors took more pains and their writing was better. "The Dixons," a veritable American book, dealing with several generations of a Western family, one that persisted in existing from civil to world war days, would lead one interested in the matter to believe that the truth goes considerably deeper. The various persons who make up the family which gives this book its title are Americans, sure enough, but rooted in the soil as they are it is strange to find how little essence of it clings to them. What is the difficulty?

The story proceeds along simple, realistic lines, and so far so good. Its personnel is easily recognizable from old farmer Dixon, shrewd buyer, restorer and seller (at a profit) of abandoned farms, down to his great-grandson, who becomes after his war experience "over there" a student of socialism, yet true as the individuals are to type they arouse but a languid interest. Perhaps the trouble lies in the author herself, who seems unable to do more than scratch the soil. Surely Americanism is not a trait antagonistic to great ideals, to passion and enthusiasm! These qualities are absent, and so is that admittedly national trait, our humor.

With ample flecks of color to choose from the author has used too much white in her brush with a resulting tameness. If she had thrown her brush recklessly now and then into the red and yellow and green her style of story telling might have suffered, but her story would have pleased more readers. Without the sharp burin of Jane Austen to scratch up a high light here and there on—a pallid page no novelist of her genre can hope to equal the success of that ancient spinster.

Were t'other dear charmer away

THE KNIGHT OF LONELY LAND. By Evelyn Campbell. Little, Brown & Co.

IN many respects this is the typical Western story. The scene of course is a region of mountains and primitive desolation; the hero is a man of the "rough and ready" type, unpolished externally, but actually the very soul of chivalry; the situations have to do with riding, with "rustling" cattle, with shooting, with adventure, and with narrow escapes from death; and as if this were not sufficient, we occasionally get an increased thrill by a glimpse of real blood.

But, as one might know without even being told, the terror and adventure are subservient to the love theme. In some respects the love story is built along conventional lines, and in some respects it is unique; we have something like the old "triangle," the respective points of which are occupied by a man and two women; but the ultimate solution of the situation is anything but what we might have expected. One of the women is a recent arrival from England, who falsely believes the hero to be in the employ of her uncle, and unceremoniously throws herself upon his hospitality; the other, nicknamed "Britches," is a native of the West, an adept in the art of the gun and of the saddle. Through most of the book the man's inclinations lean toward the Englishwoman, whose inclinations also lean toward him; "Britches" endeavors by craft to rid herself of her rival, but ultimately redeems herself by risking her life for the man she loves; and after this event there is nothing for the man to do but chivalrously find that the love is mutual. As for the Englishwoman, she is disposed of conveniently by the opportune arrival of a lover from across the sea.

From this summary one may divine that the chief merit of the book is its ability to entertain. The plot on the whole is well worked out, and the story is interesting; but it is marred by a too liberal sprinkling of the melodramatic, and is not always convincing. It is exactly the type of tale that one might expect to see as a motion picture "thriller."

Americans do not agonize

ZELL. By Henry G. Alkman. Alfred A. Knopf.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH HOUGHTON.

THE old question, "What is Americanism?" would seem to be, for thoughtful people, better answered by the modern novelist than by the National Security League or the "intelligent weeklies." Sectional and class specialists such as Mary E. Wilkins Freeman for New England, or for the country club layer of society, F. Scott Fitzgerald, may light up their own corners of it. They are perhaps not so near the centre of the controversy as Sherwood Anderson, Floyd Dell or that topographical artist Mr. Sinclair Lewis, since in the middle West the fusion of peoples makes for a more general approach to literature. Henry G. Alkman in "Zell" is warmest of all in the search.

"Zell" strikes first as a good story put together by a faithful craftsman. It is not a nervous book. In the scene where Agathia and the children visit the faithless husband there are climax and restraint; very nearly all of the situations chosen have dramatic value. Even stronger rings out the sureness of tone—a tone which might be called the un-intensity with which the American goes to meet life experiences, excepting only the much advertised stock exchange game.

As a rule the American business man who finds that his wife prefers an artist hesitates—be it vanity or fear that prevents action. He dreads sympathy as much as the garishness of public print. He keeps silence. The excess in feeling of the Slav is foreign to us because we have not that limpid mind which for the Slav reflects clearly all his emotional tremors. With us analysis, of the mental sort, goes but to a certain point. Thus Anderson and Dell, by the very keenness of their inward eye, miss that shade of universality which in great part we learn to look for, and which in "Zell" we find.

For instance, more poignant than the main struggle of the citizen and artist in Avery Zell is the brother and sister relation of Avery and Winifred. It grows, through self-sacrifice, from the miserable friction of early years into a calm bond of affection. Significant also, for this point of view, that instinctive father love which keeps Avery from breaking up his life to follow art. A letter from Inez, the girl who would have shared his musical career, elicits a whispered "Damn." Then, says the book, "Avery abruptly folded the letter and stuffed it into his pocket." This is quite all we know of his thoughts until, at the opera, hearing Inez sing "Connais-tu le pays" from Mignon he wonders: "Inez Copeland has found complete self-expression. And how would it be with me if I had gone?"

This is for him a moment of awareness; he is "on the threshold of one of those rare intervals when one really sees oneself." Yet in Avery, the American citizen, there is no despair. "If some one could only have done for me what I shall do for my son," he thought. "Self-expression is the deepest of human necessities, yet no one shows us how to achieve it. Either we never find it at all or else we stumble upon it—after years of wastage—too late. . . Still he felt strangely at peace. He would never have to worry about money again . . . and he had found himself somewhat in his work."

Thus, it is characteristic of us Americans that we realize, without emotional agony, our situation.

Irrigation makes romance blossom

THE DESERT FIDDLER. By William H. Hamby. Doubleday, Page & Co.

Reviewed by MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS.

"THE Desert Fiddler" has a trace of novelty notwithstanding it lives up to the Hamby hallmark by being of the West, Western. Its scene is the wonderful Imperial Valley just where the international boundary separates Arizona and Mexico. Irrigation makes the Imperial outrival the Nile Valley. Also and further, cotton culture makes it outrival the richest bonanza. The Yazoo Delta even cannot stand beside it in yield, provided, of course, it gets water enough, and at the right time.

In this proviso lies a gamble of human interests almost as hazardous as the gamble of the seasons or the floods. Irrigation means water companies; individual effort is hopeless. Whoso controls water holds the cotton planters in the hollow of his hand. If additionally the holder is leagued with capitalists who have made advances to actual growers, the plot thickens without the least trouble to its recorder in romance.

Bob Rogeen, the desert fiddler, learns all this by heart, by purse, by danger of death, at the end of incredible hardships. Cotton profits seduce him into quitting his job as motor salesman to take over a ranch, at a great bargain to be sure, but with the disadvantage of making the venture upon borrowed money. Follow wonderful pictures of life and work, and human nature—a kaleidoscope indeed of humanity in the raw. There is a girl, of course—what book can survive going without one, unless it is signed by a Conrad or a Stevenson? She is the adventurous daughter of a mild college professor, whom she has induced to exchange genteel starvation, spiritual and physical, in a fresh water college town for the alluring freedom of this strange new West. She is coveted, the paternal ranch likewise, by Reedy Jenkins, the villain of the tale, who, failing to win her, plots to ruin her and the poor young rival, whose success is grit in his teeth.

If Jenkins is unscrupulous and leagued with craftier Mexican officials, Rogeen has wit and pluck, and friends in need and deed. To tell categorically the tale of this struggle would be unfair alike to writer and prospective readers. Bob gets the girl—that goes without saying. And Jenkins gets his come-uppance—in a manner neat, humorous and splendidly efficient. The only character left with a reasonable grievance is the fiddle. Notwithstanding it stands godfather, as it were, to the volume, it is hardly even second fiddle throughout the telling. Which is manifestly unfair. Let us hope that the luckless instrument takes its revenge by soundings dirgelike when it should be gay.

Eyes have they but they see not

THE CURTAIN. By Alexander Macfarlan. Dodd, Mead & Co.

BLINDNESS, we take it, is the "curtain" of Alexander Macfarlan's novel of exotic, passionate life on the island of Corsica that he sets down in a staccato style which is not without a certain amount of force. His tale concerns a maimed unduly sensitive and fairly worthless British Consul; a British spinster who acts as the Consul's secretary for little money and a great love; and one Mabel Cain, one of the immortal type of women whom it has become the fashion to call unmoral; a novelist acting as chorus and character in the concerned quartet.

Mabel Cain is a blind violinist in a cheap and dubious cafe in Ajaccio, and her life is of a piece with the character of that resort. Through the agency of the novelist she meets the British Consul, who falls in love with her, partly because her blindness prevents her from being repulsed by the sight of his withered hand. With an eye to the chance of being rescued from her workaday life Mabel Cain agrees to marry the Consul. And then the secretary tells the Consul that she has knowledge Mabel Cain's sight can be restored by an operation.

At the Consul's expense Mabel goes to Paris, her sight is restored, and with that gift comes revulsion against the Consul. She runs away with his uncle, introduced into the plot apparently for no other purpose. In his turn the Consul loses his sight and with blindness comes understanding of the real worth of his secretary. And the tale closes with her return and their reconciliation. The story is a curious combination of Latinesque realism and emphasis upon the moralities.

Shorty McCabe's Americanisms

MEET 'EM WITH SHORTY McCABE. By Sewell Ford. Edward J. Clode.

MR. FORD has established a reputation as a humorist. His writings abound with that flippant give and take which is styled "American humor." This hero, Shorty McCabe, might well do a turn in vaudeville. He appeals to our democratic desire to see the roughput one over on the highbrow. The first episode in this volume shows Shorty having a run-in with one of his classiest friends, Lionel Pinckney Ogden Bruce. We suspect that in writing his account of the conversation Shorty put in some of the things which he felt he ought to have said.

"Honest now, Pinckney," says I, "can you remember ever havin' done anything useful in your life?"

"Let's see," says he rubbing his chin with the crook end of his walking stick thoughtful. "Wouldn't you count being best man at some twenty-odd weddings."

"Ruled out," say I. "You may think that's your steady job, but it ain't; it's just a habit. One more guess."

"Well," says he, "I don't know that I can recall—oh, I say, though! Surely I can. Didn't I invent a new cocktail once? Why the fellows still talk about——"

"Disqualified," says I. "Besides you'd better forget that you ever had criminal instincts like that. In a year or two more a confession of that sort would send you to jail."

"You mean," said Pinckney, "that cocktail mixing will be regarded as compounding a felony? Oh, I say, Shorty, but that's rather good, you know."

"You're welcome to the serial rights," say I.

Two things should be said about this book. It was written by Sewell Ford, not the sage of Detroit. For them as likes it, that's the sort of thing they like.

EVEN A CHURCH CLAPPER MAY GO TOO OFT TO BELL

THE WOLF OF PURPLE CANYON. By Charles Keanmore Ulrich. The James A. McCann Company.

Reviewed by JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON.

THE West that was—the West of bad men and bandy legged bandits, of cowboys and rustlers and wicked Mexicans in sombreros, not the West of "respectable married people with umbrellas"—runs full blooded and riotously living through the book which Mr. Ulrich has so fitly called "The Wolf of Purple Canyon."

Who has a better right to limn the West of the sage bush and the rum olossom, of sheriffs and rustlers, than this author who for two years rode mustangs and whirred lariats—long before Theodore Roosevelt discovered that beyond the Rockies was a land of good copy.

Since leaving the hard riding, hard drinking realm of yesteryear, Mr. Ulrich has been newspaper man, actor and playwright, as well as scenario shifter. Surely none is more equipped than he is to make this drama of the types move before us on its way, no doubt, to a successful presentation on the silver screen. He does not mince words; he hurls them at us with prodigal hand dipped deep in the hopper of an exuberant fancy. His chapter headings, which have the lilt of cinema captions, swirl onward as they intrigue the interest in "The Scroll of the Gods," "The Trail of the Wolf" and "The School of Love."

The Wolf, wild and untamed though he seems to be, was really only a rum hound of those "dear, damp days beyond recall." Under the tutelage of the little god with the bow, he becomes as gentle as a lamb, although he still wears his chaps and the balance of his lupine garb. This hero, James Halloway, alias "Jim," alias "The Wolf," is a fine fellow, and the heroine is both winsome and sweet, but commend us, after all, to bad old Valdez, the cross eyed bandit from Mexico, than whom nothing so much becomes in all his life as his ingenious taking off. Attempting to negotiate a chasm in the tower of the cathedral where he plotted to make the heroine marry him, this wicked son of nowhere lets the rotting and fragile plank slip from beneath him, and just manages to get hold of the end of the clapper of the deep toned bell. "Curfew shall not ring to-night" and "The Heart of Maryland" are mere kindergarten pastimes compared with the fierce, wild game which Destiny plays with the violent Valdez before the clapper breaks from its rusted hold and he goes down—down—down to his mangled death. One would fare far, indeed, before finding a more dramatic situation worked out, with finer appreciation of the verities of stage and screen and life, than is contained in this chapter, entitled, "The Bell Clapper." It thrills the senses and thralls the soul.

Mr. Ulrich's book makes no pretence to a highly burnished literary finish, but from the moment that the Wolf is introduced in his den, drinking copiously and steeped in sin, until he reaches the end of the story, regenerated by a great love, and with the heroine nestling on his manly chest, there is not a dull moment nor a lagging line.